

October 31, 1952

Dr. Edgar Altenburg
Department of Biology
Rice Institute
Houston, Texas

Dear Dr. Altenburg:

Thank you for your letter and the enclosed reprints. Actually, I did not have enough space in the chapter in Bacterial Physiology to develop the subject fully, and this is the only reason that no reference was made to your work. Similar speculations have been made for a great many years— e.g. by Burnet in 1929 and 1936 and by Wollman in 1925— but various interpretations have been put on them.

You must not think that I have overlooked your writings. Some years ago I asked for reprints, which were not then fully available. You will find references to them in the following:

Ann. Rev. Microbiology 1949 3:1-22
Cold Spring Harbor Symposium 1951 16:413-443
Genetics in the 20th Century 1951 Chapter 13

As it happens, I have a review "Cell genetics and hereditary symbiosis" in press in Physiological Reviews: it should be in print momentarily. I hope I will be understood and believed when I describe this as an eclectic construction; the main point was to push this notion as far as it goes. The logical conclusion, as it has seemed to me, is that one cannot readily distinguish the "genes" from other elements that may be of more recently extrinsic origin or from systems that have been qualified as non-genic autocatalysts.

The classification of these elements is entirely debatable— and this is perhaps the main point that needs to be brought out.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg